

WASHINGTON – U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Rob Andrews (D-N.J.) announced today bipartisan legislation extending current sanctions against Iran to entities that provide gasoline to the regime.

Under the Iran Sanctions Enhancement Act of 2007, H.R. 2880, any company or individual who provides Iran with gasoline or engages in an activity that could contribute to the enhancement of Iran's ability to import gasoline after Dec. 31, 2007, would be subject to sanctions. The bill could potentially lead to sanctions against gasoline brokers, tankers and insurers.

"As Iran continues to defy the U.N. Security Council and International Atomic Energy Agency, we need to explore new economic sanctions to augment our diplomacy," said Rep. Kirk, a member of the State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee and a Naval Reserve Intelligence Officer. "Legislation targeting gasoline imports offers the best way for IAEA safeguards to succeed."

Despite Iran's status as a top OPEC nation exporting 2.6 million barrels of oil per day, it lacks the required refining capacity to meet domestic demand for fuel and must import more than 40 percent of its gasoline. Yesterday, Iran's oil ministry implemented new rationing requirements for gasoline, setting off violent demonstrations around the country.

Most of Iran's gasoline imports come from Gulf States and India brokered by the Dutch trading house Vitol. Most of the gasoline tankers are insured by one British company—Lloyds of London.

"I have long advocated for economic sanctions against Iran as part of an international diplomatic effort to halt the regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons in defiance of the United Nations," Rep. Andrews said. "An international restriction on the supply of gasoline would serve as a critical diplomatic tool to deny Iran the ability to further its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons."

Earlier this year, Kirk and Andrews introduced a resolution calling for new U.N. sanctions including a gasoline restriction. The resolution, H.Res.267, passed unanimously through the Foreign Affairs Committee with 62 bipartisan co-sponsors but did not receive a floor vote.

Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and is also a member of the IAEA. Last month, IAEA Director General Mohammed El-Baradei announced that Iran had overcome its technical difficulties and now possesses the knowledge to enrich uranium to weapons-grade level. The head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization later announced the Iranian nuclear program was moving ahead as scheduled toward its previously stated goal of 50,000 centrifuges running at its Natanz facility. Days later, the IAEA reported that Iran not only ignored the Security Council's deadline to stop enriching uranium but markedly expanded its enrichment program.

Kirk and Andrews founded the bipartisan Iran Working Group more than two years ago to help educate members of Congress on the Iranian nuclear program and explore diplomatic solutions to avoid conflict. Since its formation, the study group hosted briefings by representatives from the British, German, French and Israeli governments along with the U.S. State Department and world observers like Tom Friedman.